

## In Your Garden

By Robert Blake

### Haslar Garden

Chris Robson spoke to the Gardeners' Club about a 2.5 acre garden that she runs as a community project called Shore Leave Haslar. It is a 'safe place' where tri-service veterans with mental and physical health support needs can be referred for rehabilitation through horticulture within the walls of the Memorial Garden at the old naval hospital in Alverstoke. Run by some 40 specialist volunteers, it enables up to a dozen veterans to re-engage with society, whilst helping not only to restore and maintain the garden but creating vegetable and flower beds with the ultimate aim of selling the produce and making the garden sustainable.

The garden fell into disrepair following the sale of the hospital site and her friend, Karen of SSAFA started the renovation project before handing it over to Chris. It is a beautifully peaceful place,



enclosed within high walls, with sweeping lawns, shady trees and beds full of flowers and vegetables. It is shared with the graves of many past seamen including 80 members of the Russian fleet who in 1770 were landed at Haslar suffering from typhus. Crew members from the sinking of the Royal George in 1772 are also buried there along with seamen injured at Trafalgar, who subsequently died of their wounds.

The veterans work in the garden from 09.00-13.00 Monday to Friday throughout the year. The project runs a number of open days, details of which are at <https://www.facebook.com/ShoreLeaveHaslar/>, and welcomes visitors from 11.00-13.00 on the second Wednesday of each month where refreshments are available. Chris explained how the veterans benefit from their time in the garden. Firstly they like the structure and routine, with 'stand easy' tea always served at 10.30! The peace and tranquillity is very calming and they enjoy the company of people who do not judge them. They also find it relaxing, enjoy seeing the results of their work at the end of the day, and love growing food to take home. Everything such as bringing on plants in the greenhouses and building gourd arches, fruit cages and raised beds is done by the veterans and volunteers.



The project has links to many supporting organisations including the Institute of Naval Medicine, Combat Stress, SSAFA, Royal British Legion and Help for Heroes. Funding from Libor fines has been put to good use in building a room for veterans to meet therapists, installing new entrance gates and purchasing a mower for the extensive lawns. Lastly, Chris pointed out that no time limit is set on the length of a veteran's stay. Some remain for up to two years and a few go on to become a specialist volunteer, helping others with their rehabilitation. It was heartening to listen to this interesting talk about the valuable voluntary work that is taking place on our doorstep to help those men and women who have suffered in the course of their service to this country.

